

# New Zealand Medical Student Association president

## Interview with Elizabeth Berryman

*What inspired you to study Medicine?*

When I was 9 years old I read a book called 'J. Hudson Taylor: Founder of the China Inland Mission', it was a story of a Medical Doctor who changed the lives of millions in the late 1800s. At the same time there was a fictional TV show called 'Dr Quinn Medicine Woman' and between the graphic stories of Dr Taylor and the passionate narratives of Dr Quinn, I became focused on helping others less fortunate. My 'heros' inspired me to be a doctor; however through a series of events, at age 17, I actually started nursing training at AUT. As a 20 year old new graduate I worked in Emergency Care at North Shore Hospital before working in the Outback of Australia and then in Whanau Ora at Te Puna Hauora o Te Pai Whenua. I remained fascinated by medicine and deeply inquisitive.

I completed my Masters in Advanced Nursing and my internship as a Nurse Practitioner. However there were very few jobs available- actually no jobs available – so I worked as a practice manager of a small clinic in Albany, as a way to generate funding for a position as a Nurse Practitioner. I was frustrated by inefficiencies of the health system and passionate about

the experience of Whanau Ora. A good friend of mine took me aside and said, "okay what do you really want to do?"

"I want to make the most difference that I can for people who are in need and the way I see to do that is through policy development." So there I was, 25 years old, applying for medical school. I took the 'scenic' route to get into medical school but I don't regret one minute of my nursing career at all. It gave me a lot of insight and empathy, which motivates me now in my studies as a 4th year student here in Dunedin.

*Why did you apply for the role in NZMSA?*

In my 2nd year of Medicine I was so impressed by the Otago University Medical Student Association (OUMSA). I was blown away that a student organisation could be so well organised, so motivated to help the future of New Zealand doctors. This was immensely encouraging. I watched in awe of how the leaders were so passionate and hard working for the cause – for no money and no reward! As a 3rd year I wanted to be involved, so



I put my name forward for OUMSA and was elected President in 2014. As the OUMSA President I became involved with NZMSA. Although it is difficult as a student to sometimes see the work that NZMSA does as an exec member, I was impressed at these students who were tirelessly working behind the scenes making small and big changes on medical education, health workforce and advocacy and much more. I wanted to help continue the good work NZMSA was doing. So with my modest management experience, I decided to use those skills to serve NZMSA as President.

*Being the President of NZMSA and doing Medical School how do you manage 'busyness' and 'stress'?*

It is a constant battle! A few things that have helped me are effective time management and scheduling time for yourself, by scheduling in regular breaks and holidays, months in advance. I suffer from an inability to say 'no' to things. I am currently working on how to 'focus' my time more effectively using a priority system. I use techniques such as mindfulness and prayer, which helps me keep the big picture in mind. I make the most of my break and read books with helpful strategies such as Steven Coveys 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and leadership books by John C. Maxwell. But it is a struggle and one that I have to work on everyday – having good friends and fellow medical students are wonderful supports! Also a loving husband who has supported me through the last 3 years of Medical School chaos, I could not do it without his constant encouragement.

*Over 2014 and 2015 you worked on a team collaborating with the Australian Medical Student Association on a policy for Mental Health and Wellbeing. What do you think Wellbeing means for you?*

Wellbeing –to be 'well' or happy with ones life is totally personal. It means different things to different people. Our past experiences, our culture, our expectations or pressure from family or self are all very individual. I am interested in finding out more about what makes people resilient. There are always going to be tough times in our lives, there will always be those Medical School Progress tests and exams! Loved ones unfortunately pass away, relationships come and go and patients can pass away unexpectedly. What is it about those people who are able to work through these issues and come out stronger, compared to others who struggle. I would love to study both spectrums and see what are the common themes and factors for medical students that help with the development of resilience during times of potential 'poor wellbeing'. One idea that research suggests is the use of peer mentoring. There was a pilot project in 2014 in Otago between 2nd and 3rd year students, with an overwhelmingly positive response. I am keen to see more of these student driven programmes implemented during medical school training to improve wellbeing.

*What advice do you have for other Medical Students who wish to develop their leadership skills, or have an area of passion that they would like to do something about?*

Just do it. Get a plan, get some supportive friends or family, and take that scary first step. Don't care what other people might think of you, do what you care about. Find what moves you, what makes you angry; then do it 110% and don't ever give up.

## NZMSA

The New Zealand Medical Student Association (NZMSA) has had a very busy and productive start to 2015. From our handover Face-to-Face meeting in Nov 2014 the Executive Board have been proactive and innovative in their approach to the issues Medical Students face. A fresh new approach has been taken, which involves the review of the NZMSA strategic plan which has involved a organisational structure review and focusing on only 10 core issues and 10 wider health advocacy issues.

Our Mission Statement - "To Unite, Empower and Represent New Zealand Medical Students". There has also been a restructuring of some of the NZMSA events and programmes and a new approach to partnerships and internal operations. Focusing on the core needs of New Zealand Medical Students we are pruning some areas of NZMSA to allow for fresh growth. We are concentrating on fixing some organisational issues, improving teamwork and communication between NZMSA exec and team members, and a huge emphasis on involvement with NZMSA members on a personal level.

Innovation and creative ideas have been exciting and we are already seeing some new growth in places we didn't expect. Also making sure that the things that we do are done to the best of our ability – 'less is more' approach making sure that each event, programme, advocacy issue, internal operation is dealt with in a professional and appropriate manner and with an attitude of excellence and precision.

*"To Unite, Empower and Represent New Zealand Medical Students"*